

# Breaking the silence on teen dating violence

# ALERT!

Vol. II, No. 4

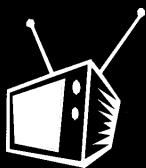
December, 2001

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**ALERT!** — a newsletter for people concerned about teen dating violence, is produced by the King County Women's Advisory Board — a program of the King County Department of Community and Human Services.

**This publication is available in alternative formats upon request.**

If you have feedback on any part of the ALERT!, we hope that you will contact us and share your ideas. The ALERT! should be what you need it to be! Contact Carole Antoncich at 205-6486 or [carole.antoncich@metrokc.gov](mailto:carole.antoncich@metrokc.gov) for more information.

## Conference Report

On October 25th and 26th, in Tukwila, the **Real Solutions for Real Relationships** conference drew over 150 participants from Washington, Oregon and other states. Most were school and community-based advocates for teens, teachers, and youth workers.

Twenty-three workshops were offered during the conference — ranging from information-packed workshops on working with teen perpetrators and recognizing dating violence in health clinics, to interactive "tool box" workshops featuring experiential activities for working with youth on dating violence and other social issues.

This issue of the ALERT! summarizes several of these presentations and an excerpt from the key note address by Barrie Levy. Ms. Levy is a psychotherapist and consultant, and author of books on teen dating violence including: "In Love and In Danger: A Teen's Guide to Breaking Free of Abusive Relationships" and editor of *Dating Violence: Young Women in Danger*.

Additional information on the conference, speakers, and notes from workshops, is available from Belinda Lafferty, Youth Eastside Services, at 425-747-4937.

### The Parents' Part of the Puzzle — Helping their child to safety

Barrie Levy is co-author of **What Parents Need to Know About Dating Violence**. Ms. Levy's workshop on working with parents of girls in abusive relationships offered a wealth of information on parent reactions and how to help them help their children.

Many parents have difficulty recognizing that their daughter is in an abusive relationship. In working with parents, Levy first helps them recognize danger signs — physical injuries that have no plausible explanation, fearfulness, giving up activities their daughter has enjoyed, becoming negligent of her appearance, apologizing for and defending their boyfriends' action, or constantly trying to anticipate and meet



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# Dating Violence/ Sexual Violence

Kerry Todd, a Social Worker at Harborview Hospital's Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress, shared information about the link between dating violence and sexual assault, and victims' reactions to so-called "date rape."

She defined "acquaintance rape" as forcible or coerced sexual penetration by someone known to the victim. This includes rape that started as physical/sexual contact with mutual consent. If one partner wants to stop and the other persists, the end result is rape.



***Be alert!***

Initial reactions to acquaintance rape include anger, fear, anxiety and depression. In addition, guilt and shame are often felt. These latter reactions reduce the likelihood of the victim reporting the assault. Among teens, they can be associated with "having been in the wrong place," or "doing something that's against the rules." Victims report their feelings in a variety of ways — "I was stupid," "I feel dirty," "It was my fault."

Recognizing emotional signs of victimization can be difficult, as many mirror emotional states commonly seen in adolescence. These include vague somatic complaints, substance use, running away, sadness, anger, feeling "different," loneliness, isolation.

The long-term effects of sexual assault in a relationship are affected by a number of factors — family support, the context of the assault, and the victim's own resilience and personality.

Family support is important. At the same time, it can be difficult for teens to communicate what has happened to

their parents, and difficult for parents to distinguish reactions to trauma from normal teen ups and downs. Irritability and outbursts of anger, avoidance of close contact, depression and crying jags, weight loss and substance use can all be associated with both the initial trauma and its long-term emotional effects.

As emotional effects persist, they can also intensify. Victims may have longer-term depression, lasting more than a few weeks. Insomnia or its opposite — hypersomnia (sleeping all the time) may set in. Generalized anxiety, and particularly hyper-vigilance to danger of any kind may be present. In the extreme, obsessive/ compulsive patterns of repetitive behaviors, and dissociation — where the victim "checks out" during stressful periods — may be observed.

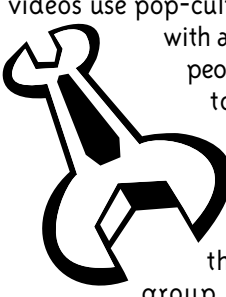
As a general rule, female victims tend to internalize their emotional pain, and manifest depression or anxiety symptoms.

Studies suggest that males cope with their abuse by externalizing their pain and displaying increased anger and aggression towards others.

The focus for intervention with youth who have been sexually assaulted is threefold:

- ❑ Providing support to the family to help them deal with their own feelings of anger and fear for their child, and helping them support the victim through non-blaming reactions;
- ❑ Helping the victim articulate what happened, and countering feelings of self-blame; and
- ❑ Providing referrals for dealing with long-term effects such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Both **Harborview's Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress** and the **King County Sexual Assault Resource Center** are options for ongoing counseling and support for sexual assault victims.

## Tools for Teens



**Love — All That and More** is a curriculum on healthy relationships for use with teens and young adults. Three videos use pop-culture clips, interviews with a diverse set of young people, and mini-dramas to illustrate gender stereotypes and how they influence relationships. The videotapes set the stage for small-group discussions, role-plays, and activities — outlined in workbooks — that give teens tools for developing healthy relationships. In one session, participants develop a "job description" for an ideal dating partner and "interview" questions they would use with a date to help them decide whether to get further involved.

The series is produced by the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, an interreligious center focusing on issues of sexual and domestic violence. Three versions of the program are available — one for Christian youth, another for Jewish youth, and a third for use in non-religious settings such as public schools. Find more information at [www.cpsdv.org](http://www.cpsdv.org).

## Who Can Help?

These agencies can provide crisis response to teens experiencing dating violence:

**Youth Eastside Services:** 425-747-4937 — Ask for Lisa Cordova, Sheri Davis or Belinda Lafferty

**New Beginnings:** 206-926-3014 — ask for Adrienne

**DAWN** (Domestic Abuse Women's Network) — 425-656-8423 X252 — Ask for Kelly

**KCSARC** (King County Sexual Assault Resource Center) — when sexual abuse involved — 1-800-825-7273

**AP ADVICE** @ Asian Counseling & Referral Service: (Asian Pacific-Islanders Against Dating Violence Involving Community Education) — ask for Amy HyunAh Moline — 206-695-7585

# Why Don't You Just LEAVE?!?!?

**Hope — Fear — Love**, says Barrie Levy, are the primary answers for teens as well as adult victims of dating violence when asked — “well, why don’t you just leave him/her?”.



**Hope** — arises from the “if only” train of thought... “if only I didn’t annoy him...”, “if only I didn’t make him jealous...”, “if only I were more thoughtful...”.

**Fear** — is often realistic. Studies demonstrate that the

most dangerous time in an abusive relationship is immediately after the victim leaves or tries to leave the relationship. In addition, fear of retaliation towards family and isolation without a partner are often



present.



**Love** — is what brought the partners together in the first place. Even in an abusive relationship, love is present some of the time, and it is the lovable aspects of the abuser to which

the victim bonds.

**Traumatic bonding** is the final answer to “why don’t you just leave?”. It builds on both fear and love. Traumatic bonding is also recognized in hostage situations — where hostages sometimes bond to their captors.

Traumatic bonding has several precursors. **Perceived threat** — which abusers reinforce both verbally and physically — sets the stage for victims not to leave because they fear retaliation, injury or death.

The **perception of kindness in the midst of terror** — the push/pull of terror and love in the relationship — keeps the victim off-center and attached to the abuser. It feeds back into the “if only” hope of obtaining love.

**Isolation** is used by abusers to gain power over their partners. It keeps the victim from developing support systems or an identity outside the relationship. Isolated within the relationship, the victim fears losing the only identity they have.

Finally, **perceived inability to escape** develops in the context of isolation and terror. Victims sometimes cannot imagine feeling safe outside the relationship because once separated, they won’t have any “cues” to what the abuser is thinking and doing. These cues are often the things that have enabled victims to control the level and/or timing of abuse to some extent.

To overcome traumatic bonding, isolation and immobilizing fear must be overcome. It’s important for victims to understand their reactions — accommodating the abuser’s demands, feelings of love and attachment, and immobilizing fear — as normal responses to stressful and dangerous situations. This understanding can help the victim rebuild an independent sense of self.

Especially in working with teens, it’s important to tolerate and acknowledge their ambivalent feelings towards their abuser — the mixture of fear and love that they feel. Focusing only on the abuse can turn discussions with a teen into a power struggle over their ability to make their own choices.

Finally, problem solving, building support systems and exploring options and plans for safety will help the victim of traumatic bonding overcome the intense attachment and fear that keeps them in the abusive relationship.

## Prime Time Lessons

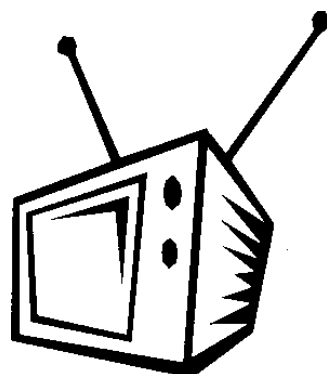
It was the Dating Game — but with a twist! Youth advocates from the **Datewise** program acted out the parts of both “bachelorette” and “bachelors” in a spoof of the 70s televised game. Audience members kicked in with their input — hooting and booing at answers that were red flags of an abusive relationship ahead.

Workshop facilitator Debbie Rowe, a health educator who developed the game to engage youth in talking about dating violence, said that the game is usually played in the second session of a two-session educational series in schools. During the first week, a health educator presents a more traditional lecture on recognizing and avoiding dating violence. In the second week, youth put what they’ve learned to use in the Dating Game. Each of the “bachelors” gets a role to play, with one taking on an alternatively controlling and charming persona. The “bachelorette” must avoid the dangerous candidate.

In a variation during the conference workshop, volunteers from the audience played the roles — with a man interviewing three “bachelorettes” as potential dates. Audience members voted on which bachelorette(s) to reject as potentially abusive.

Rowe points out that the game show format invites interaction and creativity by teens. It helps them explore and solidify what they’ve learned about dating violence and healthy relationships by using educational material in a hands-on, engaging format. Other possibilities for game-show formats include Judge Judy ruling on relationship questions in her outspoken manner and Jeopardy with

questions focusing on relationships and categories like “gender roles,” “red flags” and “myths and facts.”



# Not just selling cookies...



In 2000, in time for Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Pam Butler and other members of Santa Clara County Domestic Violence Council developed a **Domestic Violence Awareness Merit Badge Program** for use by youth groups who use badges to demonstrate knowledge and achievement, such as Girls Scouts, Camp Fire Girls and others.

The Merit Badge program was modeled on a program originally developed by the Shawnee Girl Scout Council in Keyser, West Virginia, who created the first Domestic Violence Awareness Patch Program in the country. Butler and members of the Santa Clara County Domestic Violence Council modified the program to rely heavily on accessible internet resources.

A wide variety of activities are included as suggestions in the program, including among others:

- Design a poster or display to teach your community about domestic violence. Try to include ways to protect yourself and others. Discuss places where you can display the poster in your neighborhood. If possible, display the poster.

- Do a service project that will benefit victims of domestic violence or your local shelter, i.e., clothing drives, blanket drives, etc.

- Obtain or draw a map of your community and locate places that are safe for people to go if they are in a violent situation. Some examples are schools, stores, libraries...

- Complete a "Conflict Journal." For one week write down things that made you angry. What did you do? Brainstorm about some positive ways you can deal

with the anger.

- Look up the Santa Clara County Domestic Violence Web Site at [www.growing.com/nonviolnt](http://www.growing.com/nonviolnt). Create a list of at least 15 things that you learned about domestic violence at this site.

For the complete program, including a leaders' guide, parent permission slips, and resource materials, visit [www.growing.com/nonviolent](http://www.growing.com/nonviolent).



## Questions to ask – things to watch out for...

The following signs often occur before actual abuse and may serve as clues to potential abuse. They are useful for anyone in a relationship to check out and think about.

### 1. Did he grow up in a violent family?

People who grow up in families where they have been abused as children, or where one parent beats the other, have grown up learning that violence is normal behavior.

### 2. Does he tend to use force or violence to "solve" his problems?

A young man who has a criminal record for violence, who gets into fights, or who likes to act tough is likely to act the same way with his wife and children. Does he have a quick temper? Does he over-react to little problems and frustration? Is he cruel to animals? Does he punch walls or throw things when he's upset? Any of these behaviors may be a sign of a person who will work out bad feelings with violence.

### 3. Does he abuse alcohol or other drugs?

There is a strong link between violence and problems with drugs and alcohol. Be alert to his possible drinking/drug problems, particularly if he refuses to admit that he has a problem, or refuses to get help. Do not think that you can change him.

### 4. Does he have strong traditional ideas about what a man should be and what a woman should be?

Does he think a woman should stay at home, take care of her husband, and follow his wishes and orders?

### 5. Is he jealous of your other relationships—not just with other men

that you may know—but also with your women friends and your family? Does he keep tabs on you? Does he want to know where you are at all times? Does he want you with him all of the time?

### 6. Does he have access to guns, knives, or other lethal instruments?

Does he talk of using them against people, or threaten to use them to get even?

### 7. Does he expect you to follow his orders or advice?

Does he become angry if you do not fulfill his wishes or if you cannot anticipate what he wants?

### 8. Does he go through extreme highs and lows, almost as though he is two different people?

Is he extremely kind one time, and extremely cruel at another time?

### 9. When he gets angry, do you fear him?

Do you find that not making him angry has become a major part of your life? Do you do what he wants you to do, rather than what you want to do?

### 10. Does he treat you roughly?

Does he physically force you to do what you do not want to do?

(reprinted from the website of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence – [www.ncadv.org](http://www.ncadv.org))





# The parents' part of the puzzle continued from page 1

his demands.

Parents typically feel a huge sense of loss when confronted with a child who is in an abusive relationship. Most parents of adolescents are suffering some sense of loss as their children move away from them and test their independence — but to lose their child to someone who is hurting them is devastating. When their child is in crisis, parents are in crisis as well. The whole family becomes involved — each with a different idea of how to deal with the situation.

Fathers typically have one of two reactions — “I’m going to kill him,” or complete disengagement. They have powerful feelings of hurt, anger and protectiveness. This can increase family tension, as fear of the boyfriend’s violence becomes complicated by fear

3. Keeping communication open with their daughter so that they can be helpful.

Coping mechanisms will vary from family to family and from parent to parent — religion/prayer will work for some, while exercise, support groups, or talking with friends will be more helpful to others.

Levy suggests a number of strategies for maintaining open communication with daughters. First, avoid interrogation — ask open ended questions and be prepared to listen. Second, focus discussions on safety, not on breaking up. Parents can use this time and situation to help their daughter develop problem-solving skills and learn to take care of herself — asking questions like “What do you think you could do to be safer?”.

Finally, maintain a relationship with their daughter that doesn’t always focus on the boyfriend or the relationship. This will help to build trust and avoid power struggles.

If conflicts do arise, she

suggests the use of basic conflict resolution strategies — sit, rather than stand; drop voice volume; and use reflective statements such as “Let me see if I understand what you are saying.” Avoid touch that may feel intrusive and avoid leaving without first negotiating a break.

Finally, Levy pointed out that parents need to balance being prepared for the long haul in supporting their daughter to become safer in the relationship, and being prepared to take radical action.



The latter can include getting their daughter out of town or involving police if she is in extreme danger. Planning ahead for this potential is important, so that if the need arises, the action is thoughtful, effective and safe.



of the father’s potential violence as well.

Mothers often feel caught in a dilemma. A mother can do nothing, and risk her daughter’s becoming more enmeshed in a violent relationship, or she can act — and risk alienating her daughter.

Parents in these situations need help with several tasks:

1. Coping with their own strong feelings;
2. Resolving differences in their individual approaches to the relationship; and

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# I get a lot of headaches....

A presentation by staff of the **King County Teen Health Clinic** and the **Domestic Violence Coordinator at Providence Medical Center** offered information on how health care providers recognize and explore signs of abusive relationships.

Tana Deshler, of Providence Medical Center, noted that mandatory screening for domestic/dating violence has been instituted in all acute care clinics in King County. This follows a mandate by the Joint Council on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations for universal screening several years ago. The information they shared may be useful in helping school counselors and/or nursing staff think about how to use nurse visits for screen-



ing for teen dating violence.

About 35 percent of women who seek emergency room are present with issues related to domestic or dating violence – and women who are victims of domestic violence seek emergency room care at 8 times the frequency of women who are not victims of domestic violence.

The presenters speculate that the emergency room may be the only safe place for the victim to seek care. Victims may avoid seeking care from a primary health care provider in order to avoid having a pattern of abuse recognized.

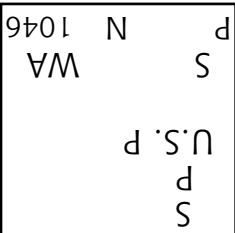
In clinics and emergency rooms, staff screen for domestic/dating violence through a variety of cues.

- ☐ Changes in appointments and missed appointments.
- ☐ Multiple visits with vague complaints.
- ☐ Stress related conditions – anxiety, lack of sleep, headaches.
- ☐ Chronic pain – particularly headaches, stomachs and pelvic pain.
- ☐ Untreated bruises, and old healed fractures.
- ☐ Patterns of injury around the head, face, eyes and lips.
- ☐ Injuries that don't fit the explanation given for them.

The relationship itself can also offer cues, with partners sometimes accompanying the victim into the examination room, answering questions for them, and talking with them in threatening and insulting ways.

When these red flags are identified, clinic staff seek to separate the abuser and victim and interview them separately, directly question the victim about the possibility that injuries or pain is related to abuse, and offer referrals and liaison to social workers, police and domestic/dating violence advocacy services.

## Tools to combat teen dating violence



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